

*National Virtue, the Condition of
National Happiness:*

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN

the PARISH CHURCH

O F

MONKS KIRBY,

In the COUNTY of WARWICK,

On Friday, the 11th of February, 1757.

By JAMES ANCELL, CURATE. K

Published by REQUEST.

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MDCCCLVII.

TO

BASIL, Earl of DENBIGH,

Sir FRANCIS SKIPWITH, *Bart.*

AND THE

PRINCIPAL INHABITANTS

OF THE

PARISH of MONKS KIRBY:

THIS

S E R M O N,

published at their REQUEST,

Is humbly inscribed,

by their most faithful,

and obedient Servant,

JAMES ANCELL.

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2 CHRONICLES, vii. 14.

If my People, which are called by my Name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my Face, and turn from their wicked Ways: Then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their Sin, and will heal their Land.

IN the preceding Chapter, Solomon, having finished *the House which he had built for the Name of the Lord God of Israel*, maketh his Supplication to God, that he would vouchsafe especial Blessings to his People, and avert the heavy Judgments of his Anger from them, upon the Conditions of their *praying to him in this House, confessing his holy Name, and turning from their Sin*; shewing the visible Tokens of their Obedience to the divine Will, or their sincere Repentance for their Transgression of it. In answer to the humble, and
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pious Request of the wise Man, God declareth, that though *the People, which were called by his Name*, should, by their manifold Sins and Provocations, draw down the severest Judgments upon themselves, and he should visit them with the Famine, Sword, or Pestilence; yet *if they would humble themselves, and pray, and seek his Face, and turn from their wicked Ways, he would then hear from Heaven, and would forgive their Sins, and heal their Land.*

Now, the Nature of God is immutable: In the Rule and Government of the World, he ever, in all Ages acts upon the invariable Principles of the most consummate Wisdom, and unparalleled Goodness. We may, therefore, justly presume, if we diligently apply to him for Succour in our Distresses, and perform the necessary Conditions required on our Parts toward obtaining his Assistance, that he will vouchsafe it to us, that he will hear from Heaven, and will help us. For if God promised these Blessings to his People

People *Israel*, because they were peculiarly called by his *Name*; we, who are called by the *Name* of *Christ*, have also the greatest Assurances of his Favour and Protection, in Consequence of that glorious Privilege, if we are careful to depart from all Iniquity, and are zealous only for good Works.

Upon these reasonable Hopes we are now assembled in the House of God, and are commanded by Authority to add Fasting to our Prayers and Supplications, which we, this Day offer to the divine Majesty. And the End proposed by this solemn Humiliation is, *that we may obtain Pardon of our Sins; that those heavy Judgments, which our manifold Provocations have most justly deserved, may be averted from us; that the divine Blessing and Assistance may attend our Arms, for obtaining Success in the just and necessary War in which we are engaged, and for restoring and perpetuating Peace, Safety, and Prosperity to these Kingdoms.*

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The Mercies we here implore, and the Judgments we deprecate, must be universally confessed to be of the highest Importance to us, considered separately as Individuals, or as that collective Body of People, of which the Kingdom is composed: And therefore, we cannot be too solicitous to obtain the one, or avoid the other. And, how can frail Mortals more reasonably hope for Success, or expect more certainly and securely to *escape the Danger of the Enemy*, and the Calamities which the Sword might bring upon them, and to be *kept in perpetual Peace and Safety*, than by flying for Succour to the *King of Kings*, *whose Power no Creature is able to resist*, *whose Faithfulness and Truth are our strongest Shield and Buckler*. If, in our Peace and Prosperity, we are often too much inclined to be regardless of the Most High, instead of being truly thankful for such inestimable Blessings; the Day of Adversity and Affliction, one would think, should effectually remind us upon whom we depend for Safety
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and Deliverance, and induce us, in the most devout and solemn Manner, to humble ourselves before that Almighty Being, who, by the Word of his Power can command the *Sword to go through the Land, and it goeth*; and who alone, as he can *move and divide the Land*, can also *heal the Sores thereof, when it shaketh*. If we have offended our gracious God, and stirred up his Anger against us, the greater is our Obligation to *humble ourselves, and pray unto him, and confess our Sins, and turn from our wicked Ways; that he may not suffer his whole Displeasure to arise, lest we be consumed by his wrathful Indignation, but, that in the midst of Judgment, he may think of Mercy*. And, though it may be a hasty and uncharitable Conclusion, to attribute Misfortune, which befalls any Nation or Person, to their Sins and Impieties, and to esteem it as a signal Mark of the Divine Vengeance and Displeasure; we seem not so much in Danger of embracing this Error, as of falling into the other Extreme. For,

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instead of looking upon any Calamities
as *Punishments sent to correct and amend*
in us whatsoever doth offend the Eyes of
our heavenly Father; some by their Pro-
fessions, and others by their Actions,
seem scarcely to allow him to take Cog-
nizance of our Ways; his Providence
they are too apt to disbelieve or slightly
regard, and often act as independently,
as if they had given Being to themselves.
But, let us not be lulled into a fatal
Security, by trusting to our own Strength
and Sufficiency, and disregarding the
uncontroulable Power of the Almighty;
lest we provoke him to *laugh at our Ca-*
lamity, and to mock when our Fear
cometh, when our Fear cometh as De-
solation, and our Destruction cometh as
a Whirlwind, when Distress and Anguish
cometh upon us; but let us *seek the Lord*
early while he may be found, and call
upon him while he is nigh, that he may
make us to dwell safely, and to be
quiet from Fear of Evil.

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We cannot, surely, be insensible of the many and grievous Calamities, which unavoidably attend War, even when most prosperous and successful. Conquests are not gained without the Expence of much Blood, and the Tears of Widows and Orphans are ever mixed with the most joyful Triumphs. How much more numerous and intolerable are the Evils which accompany it, when unsuccessful? We must be utterly void of all Humanity, if, upon the Consideration of them, we are not touched with the most compassionate Sense of such accumulated Miseries; if we use not our utmost Endeavours to avert the Infliction of them upon our Land; if we do not earnestly invoke the Goodness and Power of an All-merciful and Almighty God to grant us Deliverance from them; if we do not, with Supplications and Prayers, with Fastings and Humiliations, with all the Methods of appeasing God's Wrath, and imploring his Mercy, intercede with him, who *breaketh the Arrows of the*
B 2 *Bow,*

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Bow, the Shield, the Sword, and the Battle, that he would stop the Fury of destructive War, and suffer not the Enemy to prevail against us. If we are not puffed up with the vain Conceit of our own Sufficiency (and who can say that he is sufficient for these Things?) we cannot fail to become most importunate Supplicants at the Throne of Grace, and beseech *the Lord of all Power, and Might, the Author of every good and perfect Gift,* that, amongst those innumerable Mercies we stand in Need of, and he vouchsafes unto us, he would also give *Strength unto his People* in the Time of Battle, and restore unto us *the Blessing of Peace.*

If the many Calamities we have lately experienced, besides the Disasters which War, successful or unsuccessful, may bring upon us, are not to be esteemed as the *Punishments of our manifold Sins and Provocations*; it concerns us at least to regard them as *Warnings, to flee from the Wrath to come, and as the Admonitions of the Most High, that we repent,*
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and turn from all our Transgressions, that Iniquity may not be our Ruin. We have been alarmed in these Kingdoms by small, but repeated Shocks of the Earth; and warned by the more dreadful Situation of some neighbouring Countries, have applied ourselves to Fasting and Prayer, that God would not thus visit us in his Anger, nor pour out his full Indignation upon us; and whatever severe Punishments, as a sinful Nation, we might deserve, that his Soul would not thus be avenged on it. We have humbly besought our gracious God, who in his great Bounty hath given us the Beasts of the Field for our Provision and Nourishment, that he would continue to us this Blessing, and suffer us not to be reduced to Scarcity and Distress by the contagious Distemper, which hath long raged amongst them. We have much complained of immoderate Rains, and inclement Seasons, the Dearth of Provisions, the Tumults, as well as Distresses of the People; and, in general, have represented the Situation of our Land,

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Land, as highly dangerous, and have seemed to fear, lest our Calamities should be multiplied and increased, and we should at once be visited with the Sword, Pestilence, and Famine.

Now, if such Fears, and such Dangers, cannot awaken our Conscience from Sin, to serve God in true Holiness of Life, our Behaviour must inevitably contradict the Words of the *Prophet*; that, *when the Judgments of the Lord are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness.*

It may be of Use, then, to suggest some general Heads of Examination by Way of Enquiry into our Conduct, that we may the more safely form our Opinion, whether, from these Judgments of the Lord, we have learned Righteousness, and from our true Penitence of Heart, may have a reasonable Foundation to hope, that God, of his infinite Goodness, will grant us the Blessings we implore at his Hands, and withhold the more severe Chastisements of his Anger from us. For

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we must not forget the Condition of his Promises, that, if we humble ourselves, and pray, and seek his Face, and turn from our wicked Ways, *then* he will hear from Heaven, and forgive our Sin, and heal our Land.

Do we then *walk humbly with our Lord*, and stand in such continual Awe of him, that *in all our Thoughts, Words, and Actions, we ever seek his Honour and Glory?* In the Day of Prosperity, do we truly thankful for his bountiful giving-kindnesses and tender Mercies; do we presumptuously conclude, that *by his Hand, and the Strength of our Arm, he hath gotten us our Wealth?* In the Day of Adversity, do we truly turn unto him, and get us to our Lord *right humbly*? Is our Sorrow and Contrition real, sincere for our past Offences; or is our *weeping, fasting, and praying*, no longer an Effect upon us, than that we feel the heavy Rod of Affliction? Are we uncharitable in judgment of the Sins and Impieties of the People, who have been visited with more

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more dreadful and extensive Calamities
Do we pronounce them *Sinners above all*
others, because they suffered such Things
and at the same Time not duly reflect
that *unless we repent, we may all likewise*
perish? Do we, with Abhorrence and
Detestation exclaim against the Cruelties
and Superstitions of a corrupted Religion?
We must then be careful to set
a just Value upon that which is pure
and undefiled, and to maintain its Dignity,
by suffering it to have a correspondent
Influence on our Lives and
Conversations, *adorning the Doctrine of*
God our Saviour in all Things, as becometh
the Disciples of Christ. Are we, therefore,
diligent in performing all those
Duties which are enjoined us by the
Laws of Christianity? And in particular,
as Prayer is a necessary Condition
required of us in the Text, towards obtaining
the Favour of God, do we remember
to keep holy one Day in Seven
and offer up our Prayers and Praises in
his Temple, on the *Sabbath*, which he
hath appointed to be *a Rest unto all*
People

People, with that Seriousness and Frequency, that Reverence and Devotion, that Simplicity and godly Sincerity, which are requisite to make all our Sacrifices acceptable and well-pleasing in his Sight? Do we *confess and acknowledge our Sins before him with full Purpose of Amendment of Life*, and an hearty Resolution to forsake our Wickedness, to keep his Commandments, and walk from henceforth in his holy Ways? Do we, with a reverential Joy, and religious Thankfulness, *set forth his most worthy Praise*, and *hear his most holy Word*; and with a meek and lowly Heart, with the deepest Sense of our Necessities, Ignorance, and Infirmities, *ask those Things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the Body as the Soul*? Or do we, upon every idle Humour, and every trifling Pretence of Business or Pleasure, excuse ourselves from Attendance on divine Worship? And, when engaged in it, do we comport ourselves with that Decency of Behaviour, and that Conformity to the Rites and Ceremonies

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monies of our Church, which may shew
our Reverence to the divine Majesty,
and induce others, by the Observance
of our Examples, to glorify God by
the same Services? And *as Christ vouch-*
safed to yield up his Soul by Death upon
the Cross for our Salvation; are we mind-
ful, that it is our Duty, as often as we
have Opportunity, to receive the Holy
Communion, in Remembrance of the Sa-
crifice of his Death, and the Benefits we
receive thereby, as he himself hath com-
manded, to our great and endless Comfort?
Which, if we neglect to do, let us consider
with ourselves, how great Injury we do
unto God, and how sore Punishment bang-
eth over our Heads for the same; when
we wilfully abstain from the Lord's Table,
and separate from our Brethren, who
come to feed on the Banquet of that most
heavenly Food? Again, are we careful,
in our several Stations and Relations of
Life, as much as in us lies, to instil
sound Principles of Virtue and Reli-
gion into the Minds of those who are
any way dependant upon us, to in-
struct

struct the young and ignorant, and train them up in the Way they should go, that when they are old, they may not depart from it? In our common Conversations, do we so highly revere God's holy Name, that we take it not in vain, knowing that *the Lord will not hold him guiltless, who taketh his Name in vain?* In our daily Repasts, do we use those good Creatures, which God hath given us for our Food and Nourishment, with Temperance, Sobriety, and Thankfulness? For, if we consume them only in indulging our insatiable Lusts, and pamper our Vices by Luxury and Excess, what Wonder is it, if the Lord should recompense us after our Deserts, and our Plenty should be turned into Want; *if the Fields should yield no Meat, if the Flocks should be cut off from the Fold, and there should be no Herd in the Stalls?*

These Questions, I hope, will not be thought impertinent to the present Occasion: Most of them are relative to the Duties enjoined in the Text,

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upon the Performance of which, we may expect the Completion of the Promises annexed to them. But, then we must not imagine, that a partial Obedience will be accepted, or that our Regularity in these Points, will excuse and atone for the Neglect of others. As far as human Infirmary will permit, we must *be perfect as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect*. But, my Design was, not to plan out a general System of our Christian Duty; but, upon this solemn Day of Humiliation, to recommend a serious Recollection and conscientious Observance of some Parts of it, which, from too common a Neglect and Disregard, seem to be well-nigh forgotten. The National Blessings we implore from Heaven, we ask in Consequence of a national Repentance: And the national Judgments we deprecate, we at the same Time confess, from our manifold Sins and Impieties, to have justly deserved. And it is evident from God's own Declaration, that, if we persist in our evil Ways, we may expect

expect to be dealt with after our Sins, and rewarded according to our Iniquities. For after the Promises of Blessings to his People upon their sincere Repentance; he as severely threatens their Disobedience; that if they turned away, and forsook his Statutes and his Commandments which he had set before them, then he would pluck them up by the Roots out of the Land which he had given them, and would cast out of his Sight the House which he had sanctified for his Name; and would make it to be a Proverb, and a By-word among all Nations; and that House, which was high, should be an Astonishment to every one that passed by, so that he should say, Why hath the Lord done thus unto this Land, and unto this House? And it should be answered, Because they forsook the Lord God of their Fathers, who brought them forth out of the Land of Egypt, therefore hath he brought all this Evil upon them. Since therefore, the Amendment of each particular Member must infallibly rectify the whole Body, it cannot be unreasonable

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sonable to recommend a Reformation to every Individual, as well in general Terms, as more especially in those particular Branches of Duty, in which many seem to be more highly deficient: Lest God should *visit our Offences with the Rod, and our Sin with Scourges*, and for our Impenitence and Hardness of Heart, should give us over for a Prey unto our Enemies.

And he, who is a sincere Well-wisher to himself, or his Country, he who desires to promote the Honour of God, the Glory of our Religion, and the Salvation of his own Soul, will *commune with his Heart, and search out his Spirits*, will *prove and examine himself* in every Point of Duty, will *try if there be any Way of Wickedness in him*, and, upon the Discovery of it, will *humble himself, and pray, and confess his Sins, and turn from his wicked Ways*, that so God may *hear from Heaven, and forgive his Sin, and lead him in the Way everlasting*. And, as nothing can really sanctify a national Fast, but national Amend-

Amendment, let every one thus *humble* himself under the mighty Hand of God, and we shall have the surest Confidence, that he will exalt us in due Time. Let us thus truly sanctify this Fast to ourselves, by *praying and confessing our Sins* to God, by forsaking our wicked Ways, and seeking his Face, and turning unto him with all our Heart, with all our Mind, with all our Soul, and with all our Strength.

Then shall the Nation rejoice and be glad, when the Lord shall look down from Heaven, and bear us, and forgive all our Sins, and heal our Land; when he shall cause Peace to be within our Borders, and Plenteousness within our Palaces; when our Valleys shall stand so thick with Corn, that they shall laugh and sing; when our Garners shall be full and plenteous with all Manner of Store; when our Folds shall be full of Sheep, and they shall bring forth Thousands and Ten Thousands in our Streets; when our Oxen shall be strong to labour, and there shall be no Decay, no leading

24 NATIONAL VIRTUE, &c.

leading into Captivity, and no complain-
ing ⁱⁿ our Streets. Happy shall we be
in such a Case; yea, blessed shall we
be, when we thus have the Lord for
our God.

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